

## Contributions

### THE OPTIMIST

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

The fields were bleak and sodden; not a wing  
Or note enlivened the depressing wood.  
A soiled and sullen, stubborn snow-drift stood  
Beside the roadway! Winds came muttering  
Of storms to be, and brought the chilly sting  
Of icebergs in their breath. Stalled cattle moored  
Forth plaintive pleadings for the earth's green  
food.  
No gleam, no hint of hope in anything.

The sky was blank and ashen, like the face  
Of some poor wretch who drained life's cup too fast.  
Yet swaying to and fro, as if to fling  
About chilled Nature its lithe arms of grace,  
Smiling with promise in the wintry blast,  
The optimistic willow spoke of Spring.

### THE SUCCESS OF THE KINGDOM

C. F. YODER.

Argument has a proper place in Christian literature in defense of the truth against unbelief and heresy. By friendly criticism and comparison of experiences and ideas we may increase each other's knowledge.

In the EVANGELIST of March 12, appears an article which seems to have been suggested by the statement contained in the little booklet "Some Significant Tendencies of the Times," to the effect that "No pessimist ever knew God." The zeal and motive back of the article are commendable, but in the article itself are several errors which, I feel, should not pass unnoticed.

First, in this and in other articles which have appeared in the EVANGELIST, the words optimist and pessimist are misused.

Webster says an optimist is "one who holds the opinion that all events are ordered for the best" while a pessimist is "one who complains of everything as being for the worst."

If the words had been used in this sense in the article referred to I am sure the writer would not have called himself a pessimist, much less have attributed to Jesus such a miserable, atheistic spirit.

One "who complains of everything as being for the worst" certainly does not know God or the Bible or history or science or much of anything else. The optimist is little better for he ignores the evil while the pessimist ignores the good. Most of the misunderstandings and heresies of the world have arisen thru improper use or interpretations of language, and we have in the error just pointed out simply another illustration of the fact that we should interpret, not only the Bible but one another as well, not according to the letter but according to the spirit. 2 Cor. 3:6.

The ready-made clothes of language do not always fit the body of truth and the ornamentations thereof called figures of speech should not be forced to do duty for which they were not intended. Taking the article therefore as it is meant rather than as it reads let us look into the proposition that God's revealed plan for this present age will fail.

Compare it with God's word. Isa. 55: 10, 11. "For as the rain cometh down, and

the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing where to I sent it." The prophet uses the operations of God in nature as proof that his plans will not fail. More education along this line today would widen our vision and strengthen our faith and cause us to cease acting on that old proverb of the devil that "Ignorance is the mother of devotion." But what does Jesus say concerning the failure of his mission? Matt. 16: 18. "Upon this rock will I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." When at the end of his ministry with only a handful of believers faithful to him he stood already within the shadow of the cross and to human eyes it seemed as if defeat were certain, he spoke as if the final triumph were already at hand. "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto myself." John 12: 31, 32.

Will those who insist on the literal interpretation of all passages explain what the word *now* literally means? And if the kingdom is to be established by the sudden appearance of our Lord then why should he speak of his being lifted up as the cause of drawing all men unto himself? No. Jesus was no pessimist; neither in the sense of "complaining of everything as being for the worst" or of doubting the success of the kingdom which he founded. The apostles after him gave evidence of their faith. Peter on the day of Pentecost said "God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ." Acts. 2: 36. Paul too, believed in the triumph of God's grace thru Christ. "For he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet." 1 Cor. 15: 25. He was not disposed to slight human agencies and wait for the second coming of the Lord for the victory, but organized churches and taught them to work saying of his own method, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation." Romans 1: 16.

Concerning the measure of the success of the gospel let me quote from Rev. 7: 9. "After this I beheld and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." Vs. 4 "And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." Keep in mind that this vision is *prior* to that of the millenium recorded in Rev. 20.

It certainly does not look as if "one who believes the word of God concerning the things which are to come to pass" could call God's dispensation of grace a failure.

If however, we must again interpret according to the spirit and not according to the letter, and assume that by "failure" is meant simply that not all will be converted during this dispensation, then there is no need of argument for no one teaches that they will be. We may *hope* that all will sometime choose God rather than sin but as long as men are free moral agents we cannot *know* that they will do so. The very people who rejected the Messiah thought they knew the most about his coming. Jesus said to them "Ye neither enter in yourselves nor suffer them that are entering to go in." He did indeed teach that men should strive to enter in, but he did not say that the number doing so would always be small. He did say "I will draw all men unto myself." That he has been doing so thruout these twenty centuries I tried to show in my booklet, *Some Significant Tendencies of the Times*. The facts there given can be multiplied ten times over. Facts can easily be denied but they have a way of persisting after the theories which denied them have gone.

Now without being either an optimist or a pessimist, or speculating with the mysteries of eschatology, I wish to submit several propositions concerning the success of the kingdom, authenticating the same with Scriptures.

1. The kingdom is to grow naturally unto its fullness.

Matt. 13: 31, 33: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

Another parable spake he unto them saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

Now if Jesus brought the leaven of life into the world, as we all believe, how can it cease working? And what does the word "whole" literally mean?

But again, Mark 4: 26, 29: "And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle because the harvest is come."

Notice, it is not claimed that all the meal becomes leaven, but that all is leavened; nor that the harvest is without tares; nor that the kingdom will be accepted by all, but simply that the normal process of growth which has already begun will be the process by which it shall be consummated.

Here is the word representing the kingdom of God growing as a stone cut out without hands and filling the whole earth (Dan. 2: 35) and on the other hand those who call